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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL ON TAJIK FM TALBAK NAZAROV

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Hoagland, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy,  
Dushanbe, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (a), (c)

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1. (C) SUMMARY: In his July 17 official farewell call on Tajik Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov, the Ambassador summed up the progress in the U.S.-Tajik relationship over the past three years, including increased border assistance, a new U.S. Embassy and U.S. involvement in hydropower and infrastructure projects. The Ambassador noted the business climate still needed further and consistent reform to attract foreign investors, and several high-level cases involving U.S. firms must be resolved before more American investors would come. The Ambassador recommended that the Tajik authorities begin registering and licensing independent television and radio stations before the November presidential elections to demonstrate a commitment to a freer media. He suggested increased military cooperation was still possible without specifically establishing a U.S. base, through logistics support, refueling and search and rescue operations. Nazarov indicated this was possible, "with the proper mechanism," which would likely involve direct U.S.-Russian agreement. Nazarov agreed that the bilateral relationship was very strong. Tajikistan was constantly balancing its foreign policy with bigger countries and its neighbors, and partnership with the United States played an important role in Tajikistan's "open-door" foreign policy. END SUMMARY.

IRAN

2. (C) Minus the usual MFA notetaker, Nazarov sat down and

chatted for almost 45 minutes about the state of the bilateral relationship and regional issues. Addressing first the Ambassador's final question about Iranian President Ahmadinejad's July 25-27 visit, Nazarov noted the meetings would not be political. "We don't plan or desire that!" he stressed. Under agreements signed with former President Khatami, Iran took the lead on several infrastructure projects in Tajikistan, including the strategic Anzob Tunnel and Sangtuda-II hydropower station. Ahmadinejad is coming specifically for the official opening of the tunnel. Unfortunately, almost no progress has been made on Sangtuda-II." It's unclear whose fault that is," said Nazarov. "Maybe ours? Maybe the Russians?" referring to the neighboring RAO UES project Sangtuda-I. "We had hoped these projects would be finished before Khatami left office," remarked Nazarov.

13. (C) According to Nazarov, the Tajiks have "no special love" for the current Iranian administration. Many Tajiks, particularly in the government, remember Iranian support for the opposition forces and their role in starting the Tajik Civil War in the early 1990s, and the resulting "catastrophic effects." "Perhaps that (infrastructure support) is compensation for the enormous damage," he mused. He added, however, that Tajikistan has to pay close attention to domestic public opinion, and a good number of the Tajik intelligentsia have a warm and benign view of Iran based on common cultural and linguistic links. Nazarov characterized Iran's ideology-driven foreign policy as "near sighted," but noted that Tajikistan must be careful "not to quarrel" with Tehran. (NOTE: MFA Americas department Head Ismatullo Nasreddinov pulled PolOff aside at a reception June 26 to emphasize that the Iranian visit was bilateral only, and no international issue would be raised. "Tajikistan is on record as opposing nuclear weapons," he said, "but we cannot and will not bring this up during the visit. That was a condition to

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having the visit." Presumably, he meant an Iranian condition. END NOTE.)

14. (C) Nazarov confirmed that Afghan President Hamid Karzai will visit Dushanbe July 26, in part because he cancelled his participation in the January Afghan-Tajik-Iranian trilateral meeting in Tehran. However, Nazarov noted that while Karzai's visit was "compensation" for missing the January meeting, there were no plans to sign any trilateral agreements, and no joint statements would be made. Nazarov also noted that Tajikistan owes Afghanistan an official bilateral visit to Dushanbe but this currently pending visit is not official.

THE DOOR MUST STAY OPEN

15. (C) President Rahmonov's "open door" foreign policy has proven successful, Nazarov concurred, as Tajikistan has tried to establish partnerships with the "leading countries" and its neighbors. "We don't want to feel the embrace of just one country," he said. "We must continue to balance our interests." He agreed with the Ambassador's assessment that only Tajikistan and Kazakhstan have successfully forged fairly balanced working relationships with the major powers, like Russia, the United States and China, as well as with neighbors. In response to a question, Nazarov suggested Rahmonov would likely change key cabinet members after the November presidential election.

U.S.-TAJIK RELATIONS: MATURE AND PRINCIPLED

16. (C) The United States and Tajikistan both want normal cooperation and a strong partnership, suggested Nazarov, and thus they resolve issues based on this principle. He agreed that the bilateral relationship was mature and they must find a mechanism to maintain the balance.

17. (C) Regarding Secretary Rumsfeld's recent request, Nazarov said, "Our arms were short. We have commitments to the regional organizations (especially the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Commonwealth Strategic Treaty Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Community). Could we allow ourselves to be ostracized

in those regional fora?" He reminded the Ambassador that in 2001, Tajikistan was very interested in coalition troops establishing a military presence at Kulyob airfield, but the United States did not take up the offer.

#### RUSSIA

18. (C) He agreed that it was essential to find a way for the Russians to be helpful to resolve problems in Afghanistan. Thus far, Russia has not been participating, but "looking at the situation while on the black list." If Russia felt like it had more responsibility for regional security in Afghanistan, Nazarov suggested, it might cooperate more. However, for further U.S. and coalition military use of Tajik facilities, a "mechanism" must be found, primarily between the United States and Russia. Nazarov said he'd heard nothing of rumors that the Russians and Indians were negotiating an agreement over the use of the Ayni Airbase.

#### THANKS

19. (C) In parting, the Foreign Minister complimented the Ambassador on being a "working ambassador" who had done much to solidify and strengthen the bilateral relationship by focusing on the "big issues" and not getting caught up with minor problems. He said, "We respect you could tell us hard things, but always with balance and objectivity and a focus on what's truly important."

110. (C) COMMENT: Nazarov, who has been foreign minister for over 10 years, has several times asked to retire, but President

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Rahmonov has refused to let him. After the November election, he may press his case one more time. If he is replaced, we hope it is someone with his balance and vision. Under his leadership, the foreign ministry has emerged as perhaps the most liberal, and balances, when it can, the old-guard impulses of the ministry of security.

111. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: We are intrigued by Nazarov's musing that an enhanced U.S. and coalition military presence in Tajikistan is not impossible if the right "mechanism" is found. In our search for a positive partnership with Russia, this might be worth exploring. END COMMENT.  
HOAGLAND